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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001783

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/A, INL, EUR/PRM, INR, OSD FOR
FLOURNOY, CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-82, POLAD, JICENT KABUL FOR
COS USFOR-A

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [AFIN](#)
SUBJECT: CANDIDATE VETTING MINISTER STANEKZAI UNDER INTENSE
PRESSURE

REF: A. KABUL 1651
[B](#). KABUL 1480

Classified By: AMBASSADOR KARL W. EIKENBERRY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)
)

[1](#). BEGIN SUMMARY: (S) Minister Mohammad Masoon Stanekzai, the Afghan lead on candidate vetting, expressed concern for his safety after resisting President Karzai's demands that two known narcotics traffickers, members of illegal armed groups, in Helmand Province be removed from a list that disqualifies them from running in the August 20 provincial council elections. The two are Karzai political supporters representing the Alizai and Noorzai clans of the Pashtun tribe. Stanekzai told SRAP advisor Dr. Rubin on June 30 that Karzai himself has made no overt threats, but he believes the President is behind a litany of visits Stanekzai has had by known warlords - including the two narcotics traffickers - accompanied by their private militias in the past two weeks. Under these circumstances, Stanekzai seeks our support in securing an armored vehicle, after being unable to secure one from the Afghan government (GIROA). We plan to loan him one at least for the electoral duration. He is also waiting for the National Directorate of Security (NDS) to provide him with armed guards, a request he formally made seven weeks ago. NDS told him it would provide three armed guards once their training is complete. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) have also reported receiving similar threats from government officials.

[2](#). (S) We believe it is important to strengthen the DIAG program. Post is coordinating with intelligence agencies on the DIAG list in the hopes of preventing armed groups for running in next year's district level election, in which we anticipate that a large number of insurgents will attempt to legitimize their power. We are also reviewing potential funding of DIAG programs connected to vetting and reconciliation.

HISTORY OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE WITH ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS
LIST

[3](#). (U) Stanekzai is Vice-Chair of the Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (D&RC) and Special Advisor to the President on internal security. D&RC is the governing body for the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), created by a presidential directive. DIAG has spent the past year revising a list of individuals with links to Illegal Armed Groups (IAG) and Government Officials with Links to Illegal Armed Groups (GOLIAG). Names can only be added to the list after consensus is reached by DIAG representatives from five agencies: the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, the National Directorate of Security, UNAMA and ISAF. As long

as their names remain on the DIAG list, individuals may not become candidates in any election.

14. (S) DIAG,s greatest challenge has been the immunity from the process enjoyed by certain politically-connected individuals. NDS and MOI have often voted against adding certain names to the list despite strong evidence of connections to illegal armed groups. This made it impossible for DIAG to investigate and ultimately add the names of Karzai,s two vice presidential candidates to the list, despite their known ties to IAGs. In anticipation of similar challenges leading up to next year,s district level elections, Post is coordinating with intelligence agencies to promote a behind-the-scenes review of the DIAG list. Such a review could help us leverage ISAF and the UN to open DIAG discussions of illegal armed groups that enjoy political protection, and ultimately get them on the list in time for district level elections. Post recommends financial support of Stanekzai,s programs, and will ensure submissions of funding requests for DIAG and related reconciliation proposals.

15. (S) Karzai summoned Stanekzai to the Presidential Palace for a series of more than 10 meetings with Karzai in which he was told to remove the names of several Karzai supporters in Helmand, including two known traffickers: Abdul Rahman Jan (ARJ) and Amir Mohammed Akhunzada (AMA). ARJ is the former Helmand police commissioner, and AMA is the brother of former Helmand governor, Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, who was ultimately removed by Karzai under U.S. pressure due to his known connections to the narcotics trade. Both are linked to illegal armed groups and narcotics smuggling. Karzai told

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Stanekzai it is important that both be allowed to run because if not, members of the Alizai and Noorzai Pashtun tribes will not trust the Afghan government and will interpret the restrictions as a move against their tribes.

16. (S) Stanekzai refused to remove the names, citing the importance of maintaining the integrity of the elections process. Karzai demanded to know his information sources, but Stanekzai refused. President Karzai is not happy with me,,, said Stanekzkai. Since that exchange two weeks ago, Stanekzai has reported being inundated with overt and implied threats by individuals ranging from mullahs to ministers who have flooded his office, he believes, at Karzai,s behest. ARJ and AMA brought a 54-person militia during one of their four visits.

INTIMIDATION AGAINST STANEKZAI

17. (S) Days before Stanekzai reportedly defied Karzai, former Minister of Interior Ahmad Moqbel Zarar arrived at his office accompanied by a fleet of armed men to demand the removal of several individuals from the DIAG list. While Zarar made no overt threats, Stanekzai believed the visit was clearly intended to be a show of force and intimidation.

18. (S) Zarar was replaced at the Interior Ministry (MOI) by Minister Hanif Atmar last fall. Karzai tried to appoint Zarar as the Minister of Refugees after a cabinet shuffle on October 11, 2008, but Zarar refused to accept the new appointment. He is now actively campaigning for Karzai and hoping for a cabinet appointment in the next government.

19. (S) Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative to Afghanistan, has held two private meetings with Karzai, urging him to allow the candidate vetting process to unfold independently. Eide told Karzai that Stanekzai did not act alone in putting names on the list, that he had the consensus of NDS, MOD, MOI and the international community. That helped for the moment, but ultimately, the pressure reverted back to Stanekzai. I have this burden, nobody else,,, he

said.

STANEKZAI,S REQUEST FOR ARMORED VEHICLE

¶10. (S) Although Stanekzai's aide first sought USG support for an armored vehicle on June 3rd, when Amb. Carney subsequently asked Stanekzai if he required support, Stanekzai said he did not, preferring that the international community not stir the issue. He did not mention an armored vehicle. Stanekzai's aide says he believed he could secure one from the UN at the time. He asked NDS for armed guards and was advised that NDS would look into it. Amb. Carney met with Stanekzai on July 4th, sounded out the minister on the state of play, and learned that his concern for his safety is still strong. We offered to loan a vehicle for the duration of the elections. We have identified a vehicle and are preparing a loan agreement.

¶11. (S) Karzai has been quoted in newspapers in the last few days accusing the U.S. of meddling in Afghan elections by meeting with opposition candidates, but here,s an example of Karzai meddling in the elections by using intimidation to protect known thugs, Christian Lamarre, Joint Secretariat Coordination Manager for Disbandment of Illegal Armed groups (DIAG), told Polmiloff in a separate meeting. We,ve basically had the illegal armed groups we,ve been going after in our own parking lot. If Karzai ultimately circumvents the process, vetting will be meaningless in next year,s district level elections, in which DIAG expects a significant number of armed groups to attempt to legalize their power by taking office, he added.

GIROA CLAIMS HELMAND FIGURES IMPROPERLY DISQUALIFIED

¶12. (S) In a June 23 meeting between Minister of Interior Atmar and Assistant Ambassador Mussomeli, Atmar said Karzai plans to remove the two from the list, arguing that the two legally possess weapons as part of a GIROA contract to provide security for contractors (Ref A). Stanekzai denies the two are legally registered, as their names do not appear on a list of 39 private security companies recently approved for license. In order to deflect some of the heat, Stanekzai

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has met with ARJ and AMA four times, letting them know they can run for future elections if they are willing to disband their groups. Post and the UK noted to Stanekzai our unhappiness that the two men did not appear on an earlier DIAG list. Afghan agencies and ISAF reinvestigated, and both had enough against them to make the final DIAG list. One had tried to dodge the process by registering as a candidate in his father,s name.

¶13. (S) Despite the political fall-out and threats, Stanekzai sees signs of progress. He said several hopefuls for next year,s district-level elections have reached out to him to find out what they can do to overcome potential disqualification. That,s a good sign; that,s reconciliation, Stanekzai said. I,ve never known a commander to cry, but now I,ve seen it because they were disqualified from the elections. It,s less about the law, it,s about face, and that is much more difficult in Afghan society compared to anything else.

¶14. (S) COMMENT: Minister Stanekzai has demonstrated courage and integrity in maintaining the DIAG list under clear intimidation from the highest levels. Although Stanekzai worried about his personal safety, he was cautious about accepting assistance whose origins can be directly linked to foreign countries. After careful consideration, he decided the need for an armored vehicle was paramount, and asked for it. We have identified a GSO vehicle to provide as soon as an

MOU is signed. END COMMENT
EIKENBERRY